

KING ARTHUR AND HIS KNIGHTS



KING ARTHUR AND HIS KNIGHTS OF THE ROUND TABLE

KING ARTHUR AND HIS KNIGHTS

BY

MAUDE RADFORD WARREN

with illustrations by

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TO

DWIGHT AND ROGER

Preface

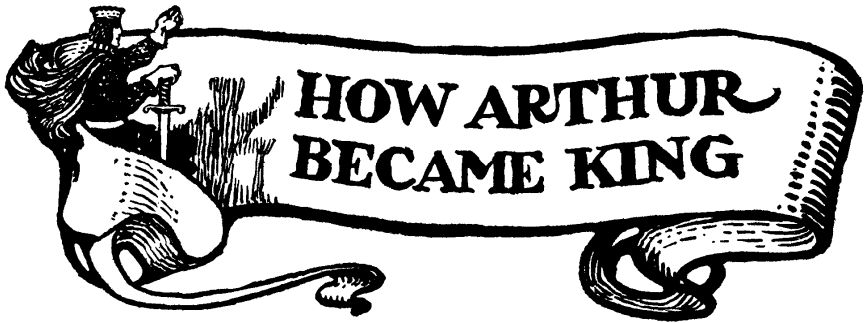
THIS reading-book is designed primarily for pupils of the fifth and sixth grades, although it is believed that those of other grades can read it with profit. The stories have been collected from Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte d' Arthur* and Tennyson's *Idyls of the King*. The material taken from the former source has been chosen with the view of presenting strictly suitable reading, and has also at times been slightly altered for the purpose of giving greater unity and continuity to the stories. In the tales taken from the *Idyls of the King* it has been necessary to omit certain themes and motives, but the characters have been treated in such a way as to preserve, as far as possible, Tennyson's conception of them. It is scarcely necessary to state that the customs and manners described are not those of the sixth century, the time of the Anglo-Saxon invasion, but those of the chivalric age, the period when the stories of Arthur were collected. So far as there has been an attempt to retain the quaintness of style found in the old sources, it has been by means of simple constructions rather than by the use of much archaic diction. The aim of the book is to give

children an interest in the literature dealing with the great Celtic legend of King Arthur, and to arouse their admiration for the sturdy national virtues of which the English race has always been proud.



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ONCE upon a time, a thousand years before Columbus discovered America, and when Rome was still the greatest city in the world, there lived a brave and beautiful youth whose name was Arthur. His home was in England, near London; and he lived with the good knight Sir Hector, whom he always called father.

They dwelt in a great square castle of gray stone, with a round tower at each corner. It was built about a courtyard, and was surrounded by a moat, across which was a drawbridge that could be raised or lowered. When it was raised the castle was practically a little island and very hard for enemies to attack.

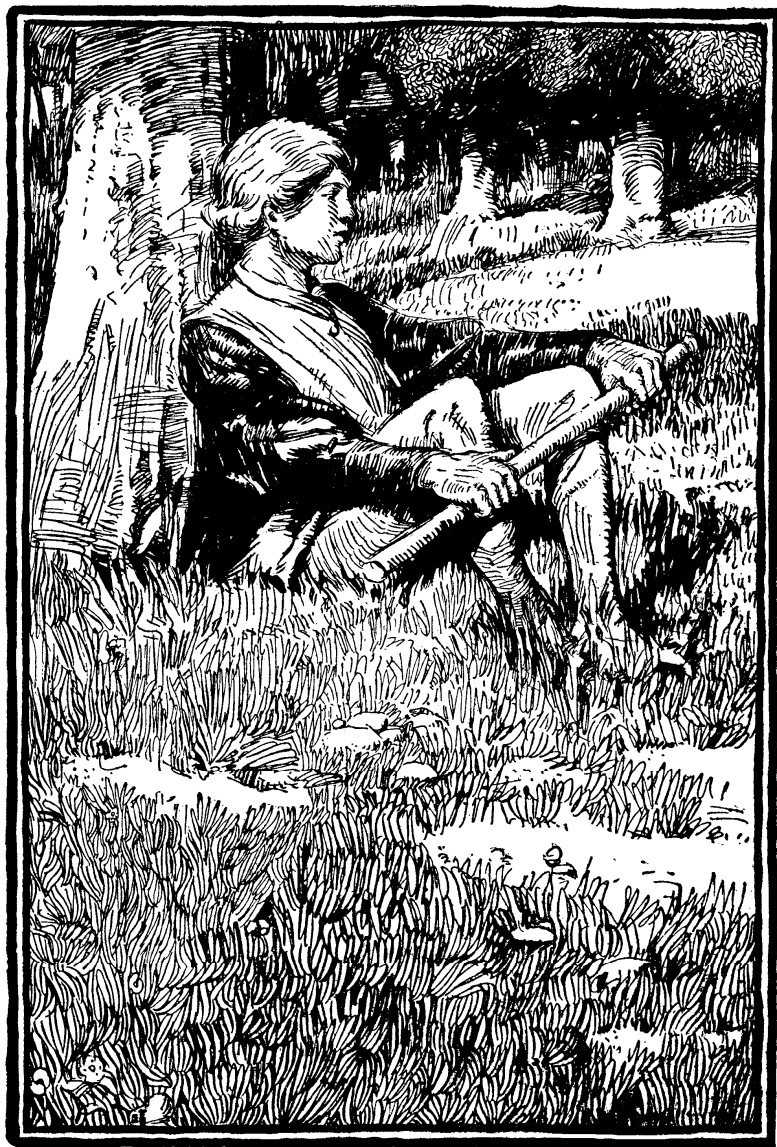
On one side of the moat was a large wood, and here Arthur spent a great deal of his time. He

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liked to lie under the trees and gaze up at the blue of the sky. All about him old oaks stood like giant guardians watching sturdily over the soil where they had grown for centuries. Arthur could look between the trunks and see rabbits and squirrels whisking about. Sometimes a herd of brown deer with shy dark eyes would pass, holding their graceful heads high in the air; sometimes a flock of pheasants with brilliant plumage rose from the bushes. Again there was no sound except the tapping of a bright-crested woodpecker, and no motion but the fluttering of leaves and the trembling of violets half buried in green moss.

At times, when it was dim and silent in the wood, Arthur would hear bursts of merry laughter, the tinkling of bells, and the jingling of spurs. Then he would know that knights and ladies were riding down the road which ran beside the trees. Soon the knights would appear on horses, brown, black, and white, with gaily ornamented saddles, and bridles from which hung silver bells. Often the saddles were made of ivory or ebony, set with rubies or emeralds. The knights wore helmets laced with slender gold chains, and coats of mail made of tiny links of steel, so fine and light that all together hardly weighed more than a coat of cloth. Usually the legs of the knights were sheathed in steel armor; and their spurs were steel, or even gold. The ladies sat on horses with long trappings of silk, purple, white, or scarlet, with ornamented saddles and swinging bells. The robes of the ladies were very beautiful, being made of velvet or silk trimmed with ermine. Arthur liked

HOW ARTHUR BECAME KING



“ALL ABOUT HIM OLD OAKS STOOD LIKE GIANT
GUARDIANS”

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to watch them, flashing by; crimson, and gold, and blue, and rose-colored. Better still, he liked to see the pretty happy faces of the ladies, and hear their gay voices. In those troublous times, however, the roads were so insecure that such companies did not often pass.

Sometimes the knights and ladies came to visit Sir Hector. Then Arthur would hurry from the forest to the castle. Sir Hector would stand on the lowered drawbridge to greet his guests, and would lead them, with many expressions of pleasure, into the courtyard. Then he would take a huge hammer hanging from a post, and beat with it on a table which stood in a corner of the courtyard. Immediately from all parts of the castle the squires and servants would come running to take the horses of the knights and ladies. Sir Hector's wife and daughters would then appear, and with their own hands remove the armor of the knights. They would offer them golden basins of water, and towels for washing, and after that put velvet mantles upon their shoulders. Then the guests would be brought to the supper table.

But Arthur did not spend all his time dreaming in the woods or gazing at knights and ladies. For many hours of the day he practiced feats of arms in the courtyard. It was the custom in England to train boys of noble birth to be knights. As soon as they were old enough they were taught to ride. Later on, they lived much among the ladies and maidens, learning gentle manners. Under the care of the knights, they learned to hunt, to carry a lance properly, and to use the sword; and having gained

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this skill, they were made squires if they had shown themselves to be of good character.

Then, day by day, the squires practiced at the quintain. This was an upright post, on the top of which turned a crosspiece, having on one end a broad board, and on the other a bag of sand. The object was to ride up at full gallop, strike the board with a long lance, and get away without being hit by the sand bag.

Besides this, the squires had services to do for the knights, in order that they might learn to be useful in as many ways as possible, and to be always humble. For instance, they took care of the armor of the knights, carried letters and messages for them, accompanied them at joustings and tournaments, being ready with extra weapons or assistance; and in the castle they helped to serve the guests at table. After months of such service, they went through a beautiful ceremony and were made knights. In the country round about, Arthur, of all the squires, was the most famous for his skill in the use of the lance and the sword, for his keenness in the hunt, and for his courtesy to all people.

Now, at this time there was no ruler in England. The powerful Uther of Wales, who had governed England, was dead, and all the strong lords of the country were struggling to be king in his place. This gave rise to a great deal of quarreling and bloodshed.

There was in the land a wise magician named Merlin. He was so old that his beard was as white as

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snow, but his eyes were as clear as a little child's. He was very sorry to see all the fighting that was going on, because he feared that it would do serious harm to the kingdom.

In those days the great and good men who ruled in the church had power almost equal to that of the monarch. The kings and the great lords listened to their advice, and gave them much land, and money for themselves and for the poor. So Merlin went to the Archbishop of Canterbury, the churchman who in all England was the most beloved, and said:

“Sir, it is my advice that you send to all the great lords of the realm and bid them come to London by Christmas to choose a king.”

The archbishop did as Merlin advised, and at Christmas all the great lords came to London. The largest church in the city stood not far from the north bank of the Thames. A churchyard surrounded it, filled with yew trees, the trunks of which were knotted with age. The powerful lords rode up in their clanking armor to the gate, where they dismounted, and giving their horses into the care of their squires, reverently entered the church.

There were so many of them that they quite filled the nave and side-aisles of the building. The good archbishop, from where he stood in the chancel, looked down on them all. Just behind him was the altar covered with a cloth of crimson and gold, and surmounted by a golden crucifix and ten burning candles. In front of him, kneeling under the

HOW ARTHUR BECAME KING

gray arches which spanned the church, were the greatest men in the kingdom. He looked at their stern bronzed faces, their heavy beards, their broad shoulders, and their glittering armor, and prayed God to make the best man in the land king.

Then began the service. At the close of the first prayer some of the knights looked out of the window, and there in the churchyard they saw a great square stone. In the middle of it was an anvil of steel a foot high, and fixed therein was a beautiful sword. On the sword was some writing set in with gold which said:

“Whosoever pulls this sword out of this stone and anvil is the real king of all England.”

The knights who read this told the archbishop, but he said:

“I command you all to keep within the church and still pray to God. No man is to touch the sword until all the prayers are said.”

After the service was over, the lords went into the churchyard. They each pulled at the sword, but none could stir it.

“The king is not here,” said the archbishop, “but God will make him known. Meantime, let ten good knights keep watch over this sword.”

The knights were soon chosen, and then the archbishop said that on a fixed day every man in the kingdom should try to pull the sword out of the anvil. He ordered that on New Year’s day all the people should be brought together for a great

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tournament to be held on the south bank of the Thames, near London bridge. After a few days spent in jousting among the knights, each man should make the trial to find out whether or not he was to be king.

The brave youth Arthur did not know of the contest that was to be made for the sword. Sir Hector told him that he was to go to a tournament, but he did not tell him the reason for holding the tournament. So Arthur rode to London with Sir Hector; and Sir Kay, who was Sir Hector's oldest son, was with them.

Sir Hector and Sir Kay went soberly in front. They were tall, stalwart men and rode black horses, their dark figures making shadows on the light snow that had fallen. Arthur, riding behind them, felt exhilarated by the crisp winter air which caused the blood to dance in his veins. Sometimes he stood up in his saddle and flicked with his sword the dead leaves on the oaks. Again he made his horse crush the thin crust of ice that had formed in tiny pools on the road. He was so happy in the thought of the tournament he was to see, that he could have sung for joy.

The road was not very wide, for few carts passed upon it, but it had been well worn by riders. Sometimes it wound through a bit of thick woods; again it rose up over a gently rolling hill. From the hilltops the riders could see London far in the distance. It looked at first like a gray haze; then, as the three came nearer, the buildings, large and small,

HOW ARTHUR BECAME KING

grew plain to the sight. The castles and huts, barns and sheds, smithies, shops and mills, stood out in the keen sunlight. A high wall surrounded them, while on one side flowed the river Thames.

After they had entered the city, and had passed the churchyard, and had almost reached London bridge, Sir Kay discovered that he had left his sword at home.

“Will you go back for it?” he asked Arthur.

“That I will,” said Arthur, glad of the chance to ride longer in the delightful air.

But when he reached their dwelling, he could not get in. The drawbridge was raised, and he could not make the warden hear his calling. Then Arthur was disturbed, and said to himself:

“I will hasten to the churchyard we passed, and take the beautiful sword which I saw in the stone. It does not seem to belong to anyone, and my brother Kay must have a weapon.”

So he rode on till he reached the churchyard, dismounted, and tied his horse to a sapling. The ten knights who guarded the sword had gone away to see the combats in the tournament. Arthur ran up and pulled lightly but eagerly at the sword. It came at once from the anvil. He hurried to Sir Kay, who was waiting for him on London bridge. Sir Kay knew that the weapon was the one that had been fixed fast in the stone, but he said nothing to Arthur, and the two soon overtook Sir Hector, who had ridden slowly to the field where the tournament was taking

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place. Sir Kay immediately told his father what had happened.

The good knight at once spoke with great respect to Arthur.

“Sir,” he said, “you must be the king of this land.”

“What mean you, sir?” asked Arthur.

Sir Hector told the wondering youth the reason why he was destined to be king. Then he said:

“Can you put this sword back in its place and pull it out again?”

“Easily,” replied Arthur.

The three returned to the great stone, and Arthur put back the sword. Sir Hector tried to take it out, but failed.

“Now, you try,” he said to Sir Kay.

But Sir Kay, in spite of great efforts, also failed. Then Arthur, at Sir Hector’s bidding, tried, and at once pulled forth the sword. At that Sir Hector and Sir Kay knelt before Arthur.

“Alas,” said Arthur, raising them from the ground, “my own dear father and my brother, why do you kneel to me?”

“Nay, my lord Arthur,” said Sir Hector, “I am not your father. You are of higher blood than I am. Long ago, when you were a little baby, Merlin brought you to me to take care of, telling me that you were to be the king.”

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“Then whose son am I?” cried Arthur.

“There are two stories: the one that Merlin tells, and the one that old Bleys, the master of Merlin, tells. Merlin brought you to me, saying that you were the son of King Uther and Yguerne his wife. But because the king was dead and the lords powerful and jealous, he told me to guard you in secrecy lest your life be taken. I did not know whether the story was true or false then, but you were a helpless child, and Merlin was a wise sage, and so I took you and brought you up as my own.”

Arthur was so astonished that he did not ask to hear the tale that Bleys told. He stood gazing at Sir Hector, who said:

“And now, my gracious lord, will you be good to me and mine when you are king?”

“I will, indeed,” replied Arthur, “for I am more beholden to you than to any one else in the world, and also to my good lady and foster mother, your wife, who has reared me as if I were her own child. If it be God’s will that I shall sometime become king, ask of me then what you will.”

“Sir,” said Sir Hector, “I ask that you make my son Sir Kay, your foster brother, the steward of all your lands.”

“That shall be done,” said Arthur, “and more. He shall have that office as long as I live.”

Then the three went to the Archbishop of Canterbury and related to him the story of Merlin

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and all that had occurred. At his request they told no one else.

At the command of the archbishop on Twelfth day, which is the sixth of January, all the great lords assembled in the churchyard. Each tried to draw forth the sword, and each failed. Then the untitled people came and tried. Everyone failed until at last Arthur stepped forward. He hardly more than touched the sword when it came away in his hand.

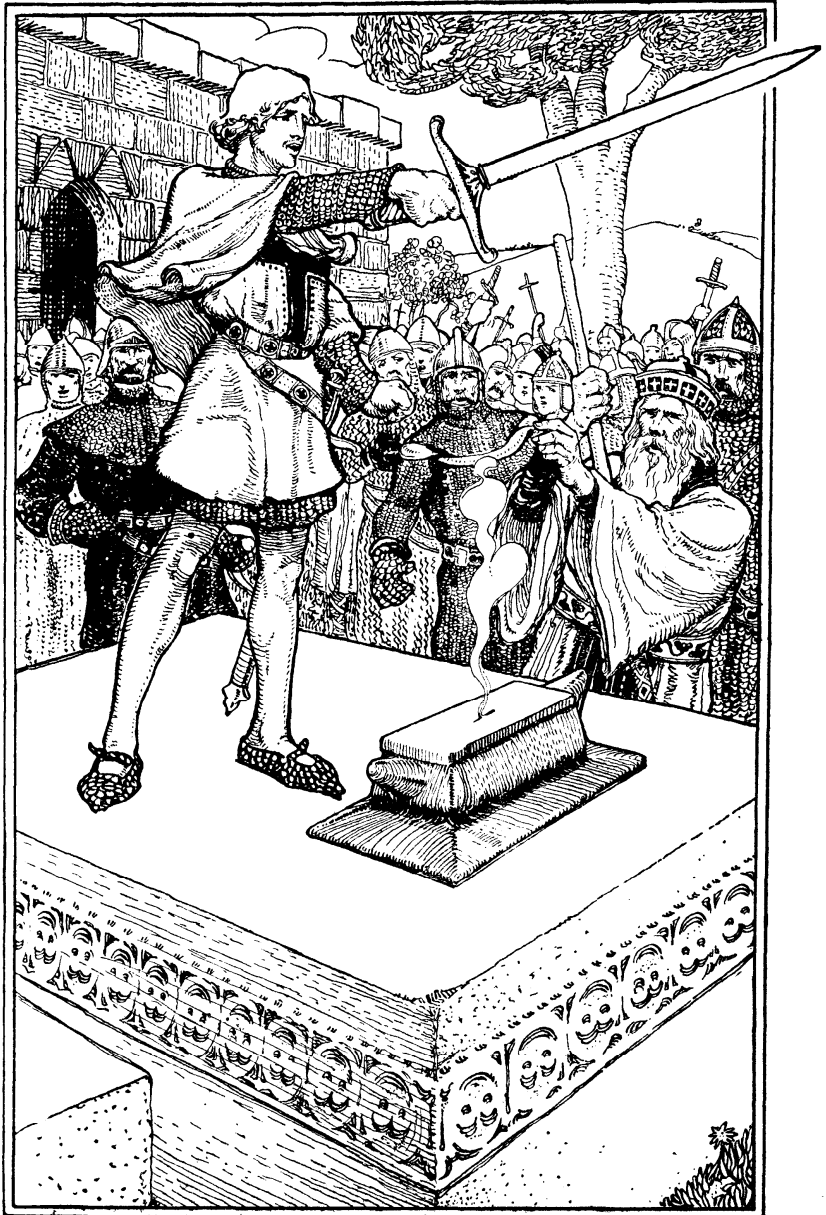
At this many of the great lords were angry.

“He is but a boy,” they said, “and not of high blood.”

They refused to believe the story of his birth told by Merlin and Sir Hector. And because of all the quarreling, it was decided to have another trial at Candlemas, which fell in the month of February. Again Arthur was victorious. Then the great lords decreed that there should be another trial at Easter, and again Arthur succeeded. Next they decided to have a final trial at the feast of the Pentecost, which fell in May.

Meanwhile, Merlin advised the archbishop to see that Arthur had a bodyguard. So the archbishop selected several knights whom the former king, Uther, had trusted. These were Sir Ulfius and Sir Brastias and Sir Bedivere; Sir Geraint and Sir Hector and Sir Kay were also chosen. These brave men formed a bodyguard for Arthur until the feast of the Pentecost.

HOW ARTHUR BECAME KING



“HE HARDLY MORE THAN TOUCHED THE SWORD”

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At this time Arthur again drew out the sword from the anvil. Then the common people, who had so far let the lords have their will, cried out:

“We will have Arthur for our king, and we will have no more delay, for we see that it is God’s will that he shall be our ruler.”

Then all the people knelt down, high and low, rich and poor, and begged Arthur’s pardon for the delay he had undergone. Arthur forgave them, and taking his sword, reverently placed it on the great altar beside which the archbishop stood. This was a sign that he meant to dedicate himself and his sword to God.

Afterward the crowning was held, and all the brave men and fair ladies in the land were present. The lords wore beautiful robes of velvet and ermine, with gold and jewels on their breast-plates. The ladies’ robes were of purple and white and scarlet and gold and blue, and they wore many pearls and rubies and diamonds, so that all the place where they were assembled was glowing with light and color.

But Arthur, who wore a plain white robe, did not think of the beauty and richness. He was very grave, knowing that he was about to take a solemn oath. He bowed his head, while the archbishop set upon it the golden crown, which gleamed with jewels. Then he stood up before his people, and vowed that he would be a good king and always do justice. All the people uncovered their heads and vowed to serve and obey him; and when he smiled kindly on them as he rode slowly through the

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throng, they threw up their caps and shouted joyfully: "Long live King Arthur! Long live the King!"

King Arthur chose worthy men for his officers, making Sir Kay steward as he had promised; Sir Ulfius he made chamberlain, and Sir Brastias warden. Arthur gave offices also to Sir Hector and Sir Bedivere and Sir Geraint.

After his crowning the king set about righting all the wrongs that had been done since the death of King Uther. He gave back the lands and money that had been taken from widows and orphans, and would permit no unkindness to any of his subjects. Thus, at the very beginning of his reign, his people began to call him **"GOOD KING ARTHUR."**





THE GOOD SWORD EXCALIBUR

SOON after the crowning of King Arthur, he was journeying through the land with Merlin, the wise old magician, when they met a knight who challenged Arthur to a combat. The two fought, and at last the knight wounded Arthur severely. In the end the king was victorious, but he had lost so much blood that he could go no farther. Merlin took him to a good hermit who healed his wound in three days. Then the king departed with Merlin, and as they were slowly riding along he said:

“I am still weak from the blood I have lost, and my sword is broken.”

“Do not fear,” said Merlin. “You shall lose no more blood and you shall have a good sword. Ride on trustfully with me.”

THE GOOD SWORD EXCALIBUR

They rode in silence until they came to a lake, large and quiet, and as beautiful in color as a pearl. While Arthur was looking at its beauty, he became suddenly aware of three tall women, with fair, sweet faces, standing on the bank.

“Who are they?” the king asked.

“Three queens who shall help you at your worst need,” answered Merlin. “Now look out upon the lake again.”

Arthur turned his eyes upon the lake and saw that in the distance a slight mist had arisen. Through it the figure of a lady glided over the surface of the water. Her robe appeared to be made of waves which streamed away in flowing curves from her body. Her head and shoulders seemed wrapped in foam tinted with the colors of the rainbow, and her arms glittered with sparkles which came from bubbles of water. She was so wonderful that Arthur looked at her for some time before he asked softly:

“Who is she?”

“She is the Lady of the Lake,” said Merlin. “She lives in a rock in the middle of the lake. See she is coming toward us. Look at what is beyond her in the water.”

Arthur looked and saw rising above the surface of the water an arm clothed in pure white. This arm held a huge cross-hilted sword, so brilliant that Arthur’s eyes were dazzled.

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ARTHUR AND THE LADY OF THE LAKE

THE GOOD SWORD EXCALIBUR

When the Lady of the Lake approached nearer, he said:

“Damsel, what sword is that? I wish it were mine, for I have none.”

The lady smiled, saying:

“Step into yonder boat, row to the sword, and take it, together with the scabbard.”

So Arthur entered a little boat that was tied to the shore, and rowed out to the sword. As he took it and the scabbard, all gleaming with jewels, the hand and arm vanished into the water. And when Arthur looked about, the three queens and the Lady of the Lake were also gone.

As Arthur, still gazing at the sword, rowed to shore, Merlin said to him:

“My lord Arthur, which pleases you more, sword or scabbard?”

“In truth, the sword,” replied the king.

“Let me assure you,” said Merlin smiling gravely, “that the scabbard is worth ten of the sword. While you have it with you you shall never lose blood, no, no matter how sorely you are wounded. So see that you guard it well.”

The king, who was looking at the sword, sighed.

“There is writing on the sword,” he said.

“True, my lord, written in the oldest tongue in the world.”

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“Take me on one side,” said Arthur, “and *Cast me away* on the other. I am glad to take the sword, but it saddens me to think of casting it away.”

Merlin’s face grew sad, too. He was so wise that he knew what was going to happen in the future, and he was well aware that when the time came to cast the sword away, much evil would have befallen the good King Arthur. But he knew that the time was yet very far off; so he said:

“You have taken the sword. Now use it to make justice and right prevail in all the land. Do not think of casting it away until you must.”

Arthur grew joyful again as he felt the strength of the good sword in his hand, and the two rode cheerfully forward through the country.





THE GREAT FEAST & WHAT FOLLOWED

ALTHOUGH Arthur had been crowned king, he was by no means sure that all the nobles of the land would accept him as ruler. In accordance with the custom of the time, he gave a feast in order to find out who were his friends and who his enemies. All who came to the feast would, he supposed, consent to be his followers.

He chose the largest hall in London, and had the walls hung with rich cloths. Upon the floor, strewn with rushes, were placed trestles, and across these, boards were laid. Upon them fine white linen was spread, and golden saltcellars, wine-bowls, and water-jugs set about.

When the guests assembled there were so many that Arthur was delighted, for he thought they were all his friends. He sat at the head of one table, and Sir Hector sat at the head of the other. Arthur

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wore a gold crown on his head, but it was no brighter than his hair, and the blue turquoises with which it was set were no bluer than his eyes. From his shoulders to the ground hung a magnificent red robe with gold dragons embroidered upon it.

The cooks and squires came in from the kitchen carrying food, their ruddy faces beaming from the heat of the fires. First of all, sixty boars' heads were borne in on silver platters. Then followed, on golden dishes, peacocks and plovers which had been so skillfully cooked that their bright colors were preserved. After the guests had eaten all they cared for of this food, tiny roasted pigs were brought in, and set on all fours upon the tables. By this time, all the gold and silver goblets which had been filled with wine needed refilling. Then the squires carried in beautiful white swans on silver platters, and roasted cranes and curlews on plates that glowed like the sun. After that came rabbits stewed in sweet sauce, and hams and curries. The last course consisted of tarts and preserves, dates and figs and pomegranates.

The supper began about five o'clock, and the guests ate and drank far into the night. Although it was past Easter time, the weather was a little cold, and so upon the stone flagging between the two long tables the king ordered fires to be lighted. The bright flames darted up, flashing on the gold threads woven in the hangings of the walls, and on the steel armor of the lords, and gleaming on the jewels set in the gold and silver goblets which the squires were carrying about. At one side sat a band of musicians

THE GREAT FEAST AND WHAT FOLLOWED

singing of the glories of King Arthur and his ancestors, and accompanying themselves on their harps.

After the guests had risen from the tables and gone to their camps, Arthur sent messengers to them with rich gifts of horses and furs and gold. But most of the lords received the messengers scornfully.

“Take back these gifts to the beardless boy who has come of low blood,” they said; “we do not want them. We have come here to give him gifts of hard blows with our hard swords.”

The messengers were astonished to hear these things spoken of their good king. Nevertheless, they told Arthur all that had been said to them. He sent no answer back, but he called together all the lords who he was sure were loyal to him, and asked their advice. They said to him:

“We cannot give you advice, but we can fight.”

“You speak well, my lords,” answered Arthur, “and I thank you for your courage. Will you take the advice of Merlin? You know that he has done much for me, and he is very wise.”

The lords and barons answered that they would do whatever Merlin advised. When Merlin came to the council hall he said:

“I warn you that your enemies are very strong. They have added to their numbers so that now you have against you eleven mighty kings.”

At this the lords looked dismayed.

KING ARTHUR AND HIS KNIGHTS

“Unless our lord Arthur has more men than he can find in his own realm,” said Merlin, “he will be overcome and slain. Therefore I give you this counsel. There are two brothers across the sea; both are monarchs and both very strong. One is King Ban of Benwick, and the other is King Bors of Gaul. Now these two have an enemy, also a powerful ruler. Therefore, send to the brothers, King Bors and King Ban who are now both in Benwick, and say to them that if they will help Arthur in his war against the eleven kings, Arthur will help them against their common enemy.”

“That is very good counsel,” said the king and the lords.

So they chose Sir Ulfius and Sir Brastias as messengers, and these two hurried away, hopeful of success. When they reached the town in Benwick where King Bors and King Ban were, knights came forth to receive them and to hear their message. As soon as it was learned from whom they had come they were led into the presence of the brothers. Both were very large men. King Bors was dark, and was dressed in black armor. King Ban was dark, too; the colors that he wore on his shield were green and gold. He was the father of Sir Lancelot, the knight who afterwards became the most powerful of the followers of Arthur.

The two kings received Sir Ulfius and Sir Brastias with much favor.

“Tell King Arthur,” they said, “that we will come to him as quickly as we can.”

THE GREAT FEAST AND WHAT FOLLOWED

Then they gave splendid gifts to Sir Ulfius and Sir Brastias, who hurried back to Arthur with the message.

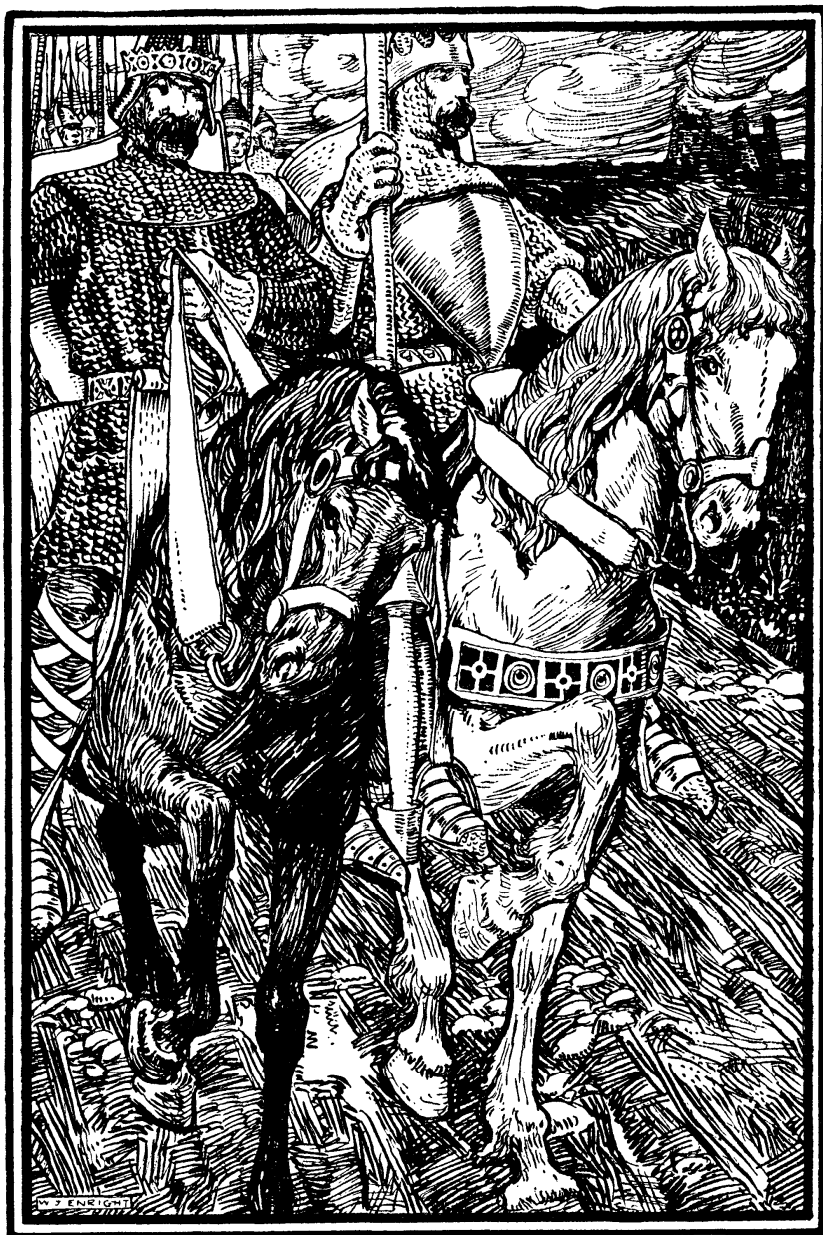
In a short time King Bors and King Ban arrived with ten thousand of their soldiers, and as Arthur had ten thousand, they felt certain of victory. They went into Wales, a country which Arthur's followers knew well, and waited confidently for the enemy.

The eleven kings collected a great host of sixty thousand men, fifty thousand on horseback and ten thousand on foot. They marched towards the place where Arthur was, and set up their camp near a wood about a mile distant. When Merlin knew this, he said to Arthur and the two kings:

"This is my advice: Set upon your enemies at midnight when they are unprepared, and then you will have the advantage."

So Arthur and the two royal brothers and the twenty thousand soldiers crept up to where the eleven kings and their men lay. They took a road circling round the wood. Moving with great caution, they drew nearer and nearer until they could see first the camp fires in a circle around the white tents; and then, against the flashing flames, the dark figures of the men who were keeping guard. Sometimes they were afraid that the noise they made would alarm their enemies, but on account of a heavy windstorm, they were unheard. When his men were quite near, Arthur gave the word of command. The whole army uttered a great shout, and ran forward in companies

KING ARTHUR AND HIS KNIGHTS



KING BORS AND KING BAN

THE GREAT FEAST AND WHAT FOLLOWED

upon their enemies. In a few minutes they had knocked down most of the tents, and killed many soldiers.

It was a dreadful thing to be attacked in the dark without warning. But the eleven kings were brave men, even though they were so unjust to Arthur in trying to take his kingdom from him, and made a good fight. Perhaps they would have made a better one if they had known how few the men were under Arthur.

Before day dawned, Merlin told Arthur to draw back his troops. This he did, leaving about ten thousand of the enemy dead behind him. He, however, had not lost very many men.

At daybreak Arthur and his followers saw that the lay of the land could be used to their advantage. Between them and the enemy was a narrow road, bounded on one side by a lake, and on the other side by a dense wood. One part of this wood, however, was thin enough to allow men to hide in it.

“Now,” said Merlin, “let King Bors and King Ban take their soldiers and hide in the wood for a long time. Then, my lord Arthur, stand up before the enemy with your men.”

“Why shall we do this?” asked Arthur.

“Because,” said the wise old man, “when the eleven kings see how few in number your troops are, they will let you proceed down the passage. They will think that if you march close to them they can overcome you. But you can fill up this narrow road

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with more and more men from the wood. Then the enemy cannot surround you.”

“That seems very good,” said Arthur.

“And at last,” continued Merlin, “when the eleven kings are weary, let King Bors and King Ban come forth. Then surely the courage of our enemies will fail.”

The plan was carried out. Arthur’s men marched down the passage. The green wood was on one side, and on the other was the lake, the water of which was so clear that it reflected the bodies of the soldiers with their shields and helmets. The sun shone on their armor. The little birds in the woods sang as they passed. But the men were thinking of nothing but the expected battle.

When they had come close to the enemy, they saw the eleven kings all in a row, mounted on big handsome horses. Their fifty thousand men were behind them. Suddenly these rode forward and the battle began.

It was a fierce fight. In a very short time the field was covered with overthrown men and horses. Broken shields and helmets lay on the ground, and many of the knights who had been fighting on horseback were unhorsed, and were fighting on foot. Arthur galloped here and there among his enemies, conquering with his trusty sword all with whom he fought. The woods and the water rang with his sword strokes. The noise drowned the sweet songs of the birds, but still they sang, and flew about gaily,

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all unaware of the grim death-struggle going on beneath them.

Finally the time arrived for bringing forward King Bors and his men. The great dark king went thundering down upon his enemies. When the King of Orkney saw him coming, he cried:

“Oh, we are in great danger! I see King Bors, one of the best and bravest kings in the world, and he is helping our enemy.”

Then the other kings were astonished, for they did not know that Arthur had sent outside his country for help.

“But we will fight on,” they said, “no matter how powerful he is.”

While they were still fighting, but with great loss of courage, they heard the loud sounds made by the hoofs of other tramping horses, and King Ban rode down on them, followed by his men. His black brows were frowning, and his green and gold colors glittered in the sun.

“Alas, alas!” cried the King of Orkney, “now in truth are we lost, for here is another king, no less great than his brother Bors. But we must neither flee nor yield.”

The eleven kings, being agreed to this, continued the battle, though so many of their men were killed that the King of Orkney wept. When he saw some of his men running away, he wept still more, for he thought it was better to die than to be a coward.

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Though they did not intend to run away, the eleven kings thought it would be wise to retreat to a little copse near by. It was late and they were tired and wished to rest before fighting again. King Bors and King Ban could not help admiring these rulers.

“In truth,” said King Ban, “they are the bravest men I ever saw. I would they were your friends.”

“Indeed, so would I,” replied Arthur; “but I have no hope of that, for they are determined to destroy me, and so we must fight on.”

At this moment Merlin rode up on his great black horse.

“Have you not done enough?” he cried to Arthur. “Of their sixty thousand men there are left but fifteen thousand. It is time to stop, I say. If you fight on, they will win the day. The tide will turn against you.”

Arthur hesitated and Merlin said:

“The eleven kings have a great trouble coming of which they are ignorant. The Saracens have landed in their countries to the number of over forty thousand. So your enemies will have so much fighting to do that they will not attack you again for three years.”

Then Arthur was glad, for it had grieved him deeply to fight so long and to lose his good soldiers.

“We will fight no more,” he said.

“That is well,” replied Merlin. “Now give presents to your soldiers, for to-day they have

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proved themselves equal to the best fighters in the world.”

“True indeed!” exclaimed King Bors and King Ban.

So Arthur gave gifts to his own men; and a great deal of gold to the brother kings, both for themselves and for their soldiers. And the two kings went home rejoicing.

